UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

May 1, 19 87

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

JOHN W. BARBIAN

ENTITLED Decision Making During the Vietnam Conflict:

George Ball and Lyndon Johnson

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

Walter E. Weiss

Instructor in Charge

APPROVED: Edgar C. Knuth

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF Political Science

O-1364

DECISION MAKING DURING THE VIETNAM CONFLICT: GEORGE BALL AND LYNDON JOHNSON

BY

JOHN W. BARBIAN

THESIS

for the

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

University of Illinois

Urbana, Illinois

1987

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam conflict was a part of American life for many years, from the first Military Advisory Command for Vietnam set up by President Kennedy in February, 1962 to the final withdrawal by President Nixon in 1973. Its images flickered across the television screens and flashed in newspapers so that images of the conflict were indelibly stamped in the memories of millions of Americans, and millions more beyond our shores. As Lyndon Johnson put it, all the horrors of war were brought into the living rooms of America. (Johnson, p.241) No military conflict in American history had seen American troops fighting in one country for so long. Many Americans wanted a simple answer to a difficult question: Why? Why, after so long, had we not won? Why after so many tons of bombs dropped, had the North st''l not folded? Why had no one in government seen the futility of the effort and put an end to American involvement? George Ball, who served in the State Department during both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations did see the futility of America's commitment. George Ball's prognostications regarding the Vietnam conflict were not acted upon by Lyndon Johnson because of a commitment to goals based on faulty assumptions.

This work shows that at three critical junctures in the history of American involvement in Vietnam, George Ball had grave doubts about the course of American policy. When the Southeast Asia Resolution, often erroneously called the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, was passed by Congress, Ball saw it for the broad grant of presidential power that it was. In a memo prepared in the fall of 1964, Ball cautioned against massive bombing of North Vietnam and the introduction of ground troops. As history shows, his words were not heeded.

The work presents an account of these three incidents, as reported by the American media and as recalled by those in the Johnson administration. Where relevant, significant differences in the recollections of these events among government officials are noted. Following that, an analysis of Lyndon Johnson's assumptions which trapped America in Vietnam for so long is offered. Lastly, an analysis of George Ball's reservations and prognostications on the conflict is presented. It is obvious that the drive of Johnson overshadowed the logic and empiricism of Ball's advice. The work, of necessity, draws heavily on the memoirs of both Johnson and Ball.

PART I

In August, 1964, there were patrols by American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin, located between North Vietnam and mainland China. Called DeSoto patrols, their stated purpose was electronic eavesdropping on the infiltration of Vietcong units into South Vietnam. On August 3, 1964 the New York Times ran the headline "Red PT Boats Fire on U.S. Destroyer".(New York Times, August 3, 1964, p.1) At that time, government officials quoted in the Times said that this was "not a major crisis".(NYT, August 3, 1964, p.1) A similar attitude was put forth by an official at the Department of Defense. Quoted in the Times, he commented that this incident was "unwelcome, but not serious".(NYT, August 3, 1964, p.1) Lyndon Johnson's response was not particularly antagonistic. Rather than order any type of retaliatory actions, he asserted the right of these ships to continue to operate in international waters. However, Johnson issued orders that if these ships were attacked in the future in the Gulf of Tonkin, they were to shoot to destroy the attackers. It was also revealed by the government at that time that such patrols had been taking place in the Gulf of Tonkin for two years.(NYT, August 4, 1964, p.1)

The attitude of the Johnson administration changed

substantially and rapidly after reports of a second attack in the Gulf on Tonkin. It was reported in the Times of August 5, 1964 that there had been a second attack. This second attack was reported to have taken place at night and in bad weather. Where the first attack had not been a serious situation to any quoted government official, this second attack was looked at a bit differently. Rather, a government official was quoted as saying that "We are in a very serious situation."(NYT, August 5, 1964, p.1) The Times reported at the time that the Chinese were believed to be the instigators of the attacks by the North Vietnamese.(NYT, August 5, 1964, p.2) Lyndon Johnson approved an air strike against four patrol boat bases and an oil storage facility. These strikes, targeted with the help of Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, were reported to the American people on television by Johnson after the planes had done their damage. After the first attack, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, stated that "The other side got a sting out of this. If they do it again, they'll get another sting."(NYT, August 3, 1964, p.1)

These incidents proved to be the impetus for Lyndon Johnson to ask Congress for the authority to issue military commands without Congressional approval or oversight. After the report of the second attack and the retaliatory air strike, Johnson asked Congress for approval of the Southeast Asia Resolution, also called the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The measure allowed, in part, for Johnson to "take all necessary

measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."(NYT, August 6, 1964, p.1) Although the measure was adopted almost unanimously in both houses of Congress (416-0 in the House, 88-2 in the Senate), it was not without controversy at the time. There was concern among some members of Congress that the language was "unnecessarily broad". Further, many in Congress saw the possibility that the measure would be used later to justify Johnson sending United States troops to South Vietnam with implicit Congressional support. Yet, the urgency of the moment, as portrayed by the administration, left little time for debate on the measure.(NYT, August 6, 1964, p.1)

The facts surrounding the August incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin are the subject of dispute among those who were in government at the time. The most disputed matter is whether or not there really was a second attack against the U.S. destroyers on patrol at the time. Lyndon Johnson asserts that Robert McNamara and his associates had no doubt that a second attack had taken place.(Johnson, p.115) Chester Cooper, however, recalls that it was only after Admiral Sharp, the commander of the task force on patrol at the time, talked to McNamara were his (McNamara's) doubts removed. (Cooper, p.240) Testifying in 1968 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, McNamara said that his doubts regarding the attacks had been removed by intelligence sources of a

"highly classified and unimpeachable nature". These sources established that attacks had taken place on August 2nd and 4th "without question".(McNamara, p.9) Walt Rostow, then head of the Policy Planning Council at the State Department, claims in his book that there had been no second attack at all. The conclusion he reaches from this assertion is that the U.S. policy in getting into the Vietnam conflict is "morally groundless".(Rostow, p.487)

Two writers on the Vietnam conflict who were not in government are David Halberstam and Stanley Karnow. Their accounts of the incidents are not "first hand" but gathered from those in government who did have knowledge of this sort.

In these writers' accounts of the incidents, a greater sense of doubt is seen among the government officials. Halberstam quotes Johnson as saying of the attack, eight months after the fact, that "For all I know, our navy was shooting at whales out there."(Halberstam, p.504) Karnow calls the incident "curious", but goes no further than that towards an indictment of the account of the incident. He reports that Rostow had conceived of a plan in February, 1964 for Johnson to widen the conflict in Vietnam by obtaining a "blank check" from Congress.(Karnow, p.357) Further, he reports that on March 1, 1964, William Bundy, then the assistant secretary of defense, told Johnson that he (Johnson) would need a congressional resolution in order to conduct military operations of any substance in Viet

nam.(Karnow, p.344) Bundy's recommendation to Johnson was to get a resolution passed in Congress which would allow Johnson to deploy forces in Vietnam as "he deemed necessary". Bundy finished the rough draft of this resolution in May, 1964.(Karnow, p.361) Karnow continues on, asserting that Johnson and those on his staff used an incident which may or may not have occurred as it had been reported in order to get apparently quite pleased with the resolution as it stood when it left Congress. He is quoted as saying that the resolution was "like Grandma's nightshirt-it covered every thing."(Karnow, p.373-4)

The beginning of sustained aerial attacks on North Vietnam began in February, 1965. On February 6, 1965, United States planes bombed a barracks in North Vietnam suspected of being used by the Vietcong in retaliation for an attack on the Pleiku barracks by the Vietcong. The response, called Flaming Dart, started within hours of Johnson's being notified of the attack on Pleiku. At this time, there seemed to be near unanimity among Johnson's advisors that this attack was needed. Johnson recalled that even George Ball was in support of the raid (Johnson, p.124), but Ball stated in his memoirs that he supported the decision to retaliate only because he saw that opposition to the measure was futile, given the overwhelming support for the measure among his colleagues.(Ball, p.390) Throughout February, Johnson stepped up the bombing of targets in North Vietnam. During

that month, a change emerged in Johnson's aerial strategy. The early air attacks had been retaliatory in nature. However, the pattern emerged by the end of February that these latest attacks were part of an air offensive against the North Vietnamese.(Karnow, p.414-5)

The program of sustained air attacks against targets in North Vietnam began on March 3, 1965. The initial attack of this program was an ammunition dump. Following the initial attack, there was an eleven day pause in the bombing, after which the attacks became much more frequent.(Johnson, p.130) This program was called Rolling Thunder. Although the program was scheduled to last only eight weeks, it was the beginning of a systematic aerial bombing of North Vietnam which was to last until the cease-fire agreement was signed in January, 1973.(Karnow, p.415) This pause in the bombing was the first of eight during the Johnson administration. Many of the pauses were over the holiday period of late December to early January. The complete bombing pauses had a duration of anywhere from twenty-four hours to thirty six days. There were also bombing pauses which were not comprehensive. Rather, this type of bombing pause was limited to a certain area. Usually, these pauses would suspend bombing within ten nautical miles of the center of Hanoi.

These pauses were originally intended to be a gesture of goodwill to the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong in order to

bring them to the negotiating table. In his memoirs, Lyndon Johnson recalled the pauses as being worthless. Not only did the pauses not have the effect of inducing peace negotia tions, they also allowed the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong to continue to infiltrate South Vietnam with troops and supplies.(Johnson, p.241) Whatever the effect of the bombing was on this infiltration, it was non-existent during the pauses. A more complete analysis of the bombing pauses is presented in Chapter II.

The bombing of North Vietnam was not like the bombing of Germany and Japan during World War II. Hanoi was never subjected to firebombings in the way that Dresden and Tokyo had. The selection of targets was carefully controlled by Lyndon Johnson himself. He is quoted as saying that "They can't even bomb an outhouse without my permission." As previously mentioned, there were many times during the hostilities when Hanoi and Haiphong were not targeted for bombings. Further, the extensive dike system along the Red River was never attacked. If this had been done, the resulting flooding would have, in all likelihood, killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. The reasons that this careful overview of targeting took place was the fear that the Communist Chinese would intervene in North Viet nam.(Karnow, p.415)

The use of ground troops was another dimension of the conflict in Vietnam which was characterized by slow

introduction and more rapid escalation as their effectiveness diminished. When Lyndon Johnson assumed office after the assassination of President Kennedy, there were 16,000 American military personnel in Vietnam. These were not combat troops, rather, they constituted a military advisory force. By the end of 1964, there were an additional 7,000 advisors in the country. On February 22, 1965, only two weeks after the attack on the barracks at Pleiku, a request for two battalions of Marines was made by General William Westmoreland. The justification for this request of combat troops was the need to defend the United States airfield at Danang. It was at this base that planes too large to operate from aircraft carriers were stationed.(Karnow, p.415) The planes based at Danang were the large bombers used in the Rolling Thunder operation. The New York Times made only a small note of the Marines' arrival at Danang. "United States Marines began landing this morning at the bay north of Danang to take up security duties around the large United States jet airfield there."(NYT, March, 8, 1965, p.1)

On April 1, 1965 General Westmoreland asked for two things from Lyndon Johnson. One was more troops. He asked for two additional battalions for the defense of United States' installations near Hue. He also asked for an additional 18,000 support personnel to be sent to Vietnam. The second thing which Westmoreland asked for was a change in the "mission" of combat troops in Vietnam. Previously, the

troops had a purely defensive mission. They were there to protect U.S. bases. The change which Westmoreland asked for was to allow these troops to patrol the countryside around these bases. He felt that the "best defense is a strong offense".(Karnow, p.415) Johnson granted both of these requests. By the middle of April, 1965, the presence of over 40,000 Americans in Vietnam was approved. Thirty-three thousand five hundred of those were in the country. During the rest of 1965 troop levels advanced rapidly. By the end of April, over 50,000 troops were in Vietnam. That number climbed above 75,000 by the end of July. By the end of 1965, there were over 184,000 Americans in Vietnam.(Johnson, p.140, 147, 233)

PART II

As soon as Lyndon Johnson assumed the Presidency after the assassination of John Kennedy in November, 1963, he began conducting United States policy in Vietnam using some very basic principles. He would not change these principles for the majority of his time in office. Only after the Vietcong show of force during the Tet offensive of 1968 did Johnson become convinced that United States policy in Vietnam needed to be altered substantially. These principles, and the way in which they influenced Johnson's decision to involve American forces more deeply in the conflict, as well as how they influenced his decision to remain in the quagmire for so long, will be examined in this section of the work. Lyndon Johnson remained firmly committed to the principle that the United States must not allow South Vietnam to fall victim to the Communist insurgency from the North. During the course of United States involvement in Vietnam, this principle manifested itself in several ways. One of these was the espousal of the domino theory, as it was applied to Southeast Asia. Johnson recalled the domino theory was part of the rationale for policy making in the region. Charles de Gaulle had suggested in August, 1963 that the North and South Vietnam be unified, and the region neutralized. Johnson,

however asserted that "most thinking people" would realize that this plan would lead to the communization of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.(Johnson, p.63) Johnson was also resolved to maintain the commitments of John Kennedy to the security of the region. Kennedy had believed in the U.S. commitment to the security of Southeast Asia. Upon taking over the reins of government in November, 1963, Johnson asserted that the United States must "see things through" in Vietnam. Despite the tragedy of Kennedy's death, Johnson was determined to focus on the goals of government.(Johnson, p.153) Certainly, one of these goals was the resolution of Vietnamese situation

Johnson's thoughts on the domino theory were still in evidence in 1965 when he listed options available to the United States in Vietnam. If the United States were to withdraw from Vietnam, Johnson was convinced that Asia, as far as Singapore, would soon fall to the Communists. At his time, he extended his thoughts on the consequences of American withdrawal to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. He feared that the signs of weakness exhibited by such a withdrawal would force the United States into a role as the defender of all of these regions from forces taking orders from Moscow, Peking, or both. Johnson feared that his role would be assumed by the United States after these enemy forces had committed themselves to this adventurism.(Johnson, p.152) In July, 1965, he noted that he was concerned that if

the United States were to leave Southeast Asia, that the resulting trouble would not be limited to that region alone. Rather, he foresaw trouble on a worldwide scale. The Middle East, Europe, Latin America, and Africa were all potential trouble spots if the United States had made the move which would have felled the first domino. The United States, Johnson said, would not just walk away from South Vietnam. Johnson went so far as to say that this potential retreat from a challenge would "open the path to World War III."(Johnson, p.148)

The fear of the consequences of the domino theory were not the only reasons that influenced Johnson in his decision to keep American forces committed to the Vietnam conflict. Another of the reasons he felt that the United States must remain in Vietnam was that withdrawal would result in a loss of confidence in the U.S. from our allies. If it appeared that the United States were abandoning its promise to protect the security of Southeast Asia, our allies would operate from the new premise that the word of the United States was worthless. The trust which had been built with our allies would be deeply shaken by a United States lack of resolve in the region. He remained steadfast in his commitment that the United States would, at all times, defend our friends. Johnson was also concerned that there had been three Presidents who had been committed to not allowing aggression to [illegible] the region and to the defense and security of

Vietnam. Johnson was afraid of a domestic uproar if Vietnam were "lost", just as there had been when China was "lost" in the 1940's. Johnson pictured this "divisive debate" as being more destructive to the "national life" than the debate after the fall of China had been. Johnson also expressed a fear at being remembered as the "President who lost Vietnam". (Johnson, p.152)

Johnson stated in his memoirs that of all the decisions he made during the Vietnam conflict, the decision to send American combat troops to Vietnam was "by far the hardest"(Johnson, p.137) In 1963, he had been told by Dean Rusk and McNamara that the troops which were there at the time, constituting the advisory force, would be home by the end of 1965. Obviously, in the spring of 1965, a different outlook was pervasive than in 1963. He justified the decision to grant Westmoreland's request for combat troops partially on the grounds that the soldiers who were already there deserved all the support that the United States could provide. This was in response to the attacks against American barracks and airfields.(Johnson, p.132)

By the end of July, 1965, when there were 75,000 American soldiers in Vietnam, Johnson had listed what he considered to be several options for American policy in the area. One of these options was to simply withdraw. This option was quickly rejected. Johnson's reasons for dismissing this option can be plainly seen in the information

presented earlier. Quite simply, Johnson was not going to be remembered as the leader who lost Vietnam to the communists. Another option was to keep troop levels and the overall level of commitment to the region exactly as it was at the time. This was rejected on the grounds that the American forces which were in Vietnam were having a difficult time holding territory and keeping losses to a minimum. A third option was to go back to the Congress and ask that the United States be placed on a war footing and call up the military reserves. This option was rejected as being too provocative to the Soviet Union and China. Johnson feared that they might begin aiding the North Vietnamese with more than just material: he feared that their troops might intervene in the conflict. The fourth option was to use the Strategic Air Command to "bring the enemy to his knees." The option which was finally suggested was that Johnson, using the power granted to him in the Southeast Asia Resolution, could give the commanders in Vietnam the men and supplies that they felt they needed to complete the mission there. Specifically, this meant doubling the number of combat troops in Vietnam within five months. (Johnson, p.149)

This last option was correct, he reasoned, based on the United States' commitment to Vietnam. Aggression must be resisted. To that end, Johnson authorized a doubling of the troop level by the end of 1965. Early in 1967, Johnson was confident that things were beginning to look brighter for the

South. He was pleased that the "tide of the war" was beginning to favor the South Vietnamese. This was in spite of reports from General Westmoreland that the overall level of enemy forces had not declined. That is, all the enemy soldiers who were being killed were being replaced with North Vietnamese regulars and recruits from South Vietnam. This optimism was also in spite of the fact that the combined force levels of the South Vietnamese combat brigades and the American troops were not sufficient to defend against guerrilla attacks. It was a well accepted rule of thumb that, in a guerilla warfare situation such as was found in Vietnam, that the defender requires a ten-to-one numerical advantage to secure victory. Johnson was well aware of this rule. (Johnson, p.245) Based on the reported strength of the enemy, the combined force totals needed by the South Vietnamese and the Americans for victory was two million. Yet, he dismissed these calculations, reasoning that superior mobility and firepower would compensate for the numerical shortfalls.

All of this is not to suggest that Johnson did not seek a negotiated solution to the conflict during this time. In his memoirs, he asserts that throughout his presidency, a peaceful solution was the goal of the United States.(Johnson, p.249) The means to obtain the end of peace during the Johnson years were usually of one of two types. The first of these was a symbolic gesture to the North Vietnamese in the

form of a bombing pause. The second was direct and indirect contacts with Hanoi in an effort to negotiate an end to the hostilities.

The first bombing pause came on May 10, 1965. In an accompanying statement, Johnson indicated that the United States would be watching for a reduction in armed actions by the enemy during this pause. The desire to use a bombing pause in order to show good intentions to the North Vietnamese was a recurring theme throughout the bombing campaign. The second pause, on Christmas Eve, 1965, was ordered by Johnson after lengthy deliberation. Recalling that the first pause had failed in its goal, he ordered the second one with the realization that it was a risk.(Johnson, p.238) The risk was that the North Vietnamese would continue to infiltrate the South with supplies during the cessation. The fact that there were no pauses ordered during 1966 until late December is a commentary on the success of the second pause. It was, as were all the other pauses, a failure.

As early at the beginning of 1967, Johnson realized that the use of bombing pauses as an inducement to the North Vietnamese to come to the bargaining table was failing. Johnson felt that any problems between nations could be solved if the parties involved would only talk it out. At the beginning of 1967, Johnson decided to attempt to gain peace through direct contacts with Ho Chi Minh.(Johnson, p.252) In a letter to Ho Chi Minh, Johnson explained his

desire for a peaceful settlement, his willingness to stop the bombing, and his desire to freeze the American troop levels in South Vietnam. Johnson expressed concern that previous overtures to the North Vietnamese regarding peace initiatives may have been distorted by intermediaries. To solve this problem, direct communication between the two leaders was urged. The response of the North Vietnamese leader was that all bombing must end before any peace talks or proposals would be considered.

PART III

George Ball, who was appointed the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs by John Kennedy and was promoted to the Under Secretary of State in November, 1961, was one of the consistent critics in the administration of United States Vietnam policy during the conflict. He saw the policies of the administration in the light of the French experience in Vietnam in the 1950's. Ball had also been the director of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey. Both of these experiences had a profound effect on his view of United States policy in Vietnam.

At the time of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, Ball was already voicing opposition to the policy of the Johnson administration in Vietnam. After the first attack on the Maddox in the Gulf, Johnson sent another destroyer, the C. Turner Joy, to the area. Ball was upset with that decision, as he thought that the United States should stop risking destroyers. He was not surprised at the report of the second attack in the Gulf on August 4th; he was disturbed. George Ball was also privy to some of the doubts expressed by President Johnson at the time that the second attack was reported. Ball recalls Johnson telling him that "...those dumb, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying

fish."(Ball, p.370) After the report of the second attack, in a meeting which Johnson and Ball attended, McNamara advocated a further patrol in the Gulf area in order to "show the flag" to the North Vietnamese. Ball's reaction to this plan was that it was foolhardy. Ball's rationale in this analysis of McNamara's plan was that if a destroyer were to be sunk, it would come out in the investigation which was sure to follow that the destroyer had been sent to the area only as a provocation to the North Vietnamese. Johnson, after hearing this analysis of the plan, decided not to send the additional destroyer to the area.(Ball, p.379)

Ball was one of the people who saw the potential for abuse of power granted in the Southeast Asia Resolution. Realizing that the Resolution would allow the President to do what he deemed as "necessary" troubled Ball. He referred to the resolution in his memoirs as a "terrifyingly open-ended grant of power."(Ball, p.381) Realizing that the America was becoming more involved in the conflict, he set about writing a memorandum which would challenge the assumptions surrounding the American role in Vietnam. Ball worked on the memo throughout the fall, finishing the work on October 5, 1964.(Ball, p.381)

This memo examined the current situation facing the Americans in Vietnam. Working from the initial statement that the situation was bad and getting worse, Ball examined what he saw as the four options which Johnson could follow.

The first option presented was to stay the present course. This would result, Ball stated, in either being asked to leave by the South Vietnamese government, or being forced into a deeper commitment in Vietnam. The second option was to send a substantial number of United States combat troops. The third option presented was to stage a series of massive air attacks against North Vietnam. The last option put forth by Ball was to attempt to negotiate a political settlement, in an effort to delay the fall of the government of South Vietnam to the Communists.(Ball, p.381)

Ball's memo from the fall of 1964 contained three very important predictions which would later prove to be correct. The first was that if the United States were to initiate a program of massive aerial attacks against North Vietnam that this would lead to an invasion of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese army. The second prediction was that if the United States began this bombing campaign against the North that it would lead to the introduction of American combat troops. Last, Ball predicted that in the event that American ground troops were introduced into Vietnam, the U.S. would have a difficult time not escalating the hostilities and the level of commitment.(Ball, p.381) As time would tell, all of these predictions proved to be correct.

George Ball headed the United States Strategic Bombing Survey after World War II. Through all of the interviews and analysis of data, two patterns emerged. One, that the will

of a people livin in a poli state could not be broken through sustained enemy aerial attacks Second, that for all of their efforts to hinder industrial production in Germany, the United States attacks had done little substantive damage. One of the reasons Lyndon Johnson was in favor of the bombing program was the hope that sustained aerial attacks would dissuade the North Vietnamese from aiding the Vietcong infiltrators. George Ball, as expressed in his October memo, thought differently on the subject. He felt that as long as the leaders of the government in Hanoi saw a chance of eventually emerging victorious from the conflict, that they would tolerate a significant amount of damage from American attacks.

On January 20, 1966, Ball sent Johnson a memo outlining the reasons why he felt that the continuation of the bombing program would not meet its objectives. Only three months before, Ball had tried to convince Johnson that bombing would not dissuade the North from aiding the Vietcong. Further, Ball was convinced that continued bombing would not have the effect of demoralizing the North Vietnamese people and turning the them against their government. Drawing on his work on the Strategic Bombing Survey, Ball noted that the will of a people living in a police state cannot be broken.(Ball, p.406)

This is not to say that Ball disagreed with the wisdom of the bombing pauses. However, he supported the pauses for

a different reason than did Johnson. Whereas Johnson wanted to use the pauses to bring the North to the bargaining table, Ball supported the pauses because he hoped that they would break the rhythm of escalation.(Ball, p.406) However, this was no more the case than the pauses fostering peace talks.

As early as 1961, Ball recognized the shortsightedness of sending American combat troops to Vietnam. In 1961, President Kennedy sent Max Taylor and Walt Rostow to Vietnam to preform an appraisal of the situation there. After that mission, Max Taylor recommended to Kennedy that 8,000 combat troops be committed initially. Further, Taylor suggested that these troops be disguised as logistical support troops. After having heard of the report made to Kennedy by Taylor, Ball commented to Kennedy that the introduction of troops would by the beginning of an irreversible process. Ball told Kennedy that within five years there would be 300,000 men in the rice paddies, and they would never be seen again. Kennedy dismissed Ball's concern, telling him that "George, you're just crazier than hell. That just isn't going to happen."(Ball, p.366) By the end of 1966, there were close to 400,000 American combat troops in Vietnam.

Why was George Ball's advice not heeded by Lyndon Johnson? Perhaps the answer to this question can be found in an examination of the relationship between the two men. Ball recalls an incident where Johnson told Ball that he "wasn't one of those smart-ass eggheads."(Ball, p.426) Ball's

impressions of Johnson were that he viewed relations between governments as really relations between people and personalities.(Ball, p.427) Despite the criticism of Johnson's policies which were advanced by Ball, he recalls Johnson as being a "friendly listener."(Ball, p.430) However, these qualities which Ball gives to Johnson do not tend to indicate a personality given to a close analysis of history, or reasoned advice from those who were not "eggheads". Rather, They indicate a willingness to cling tenaciously to the belief that "since we have overwhelming technology, and I can talk to Ho, things will turn out the way we want them to".

In his memoirs, Lyndon Johnson does not go into any detail regarding his feelings toward George Ball. However, a synthesis of other recollections might aid in this analysis. Recall the comment addressed to Ball from Johnson. Karnow asserts that Ball was valuable to Johnson as a "devil's advocate".(Karnow, p.404) In this capacity, he was a comfort to Johnson. By speaking his mind, he helped him see other sides of an issue which many of Johnson's other advisers would not raise.

In the end, though, it was Johnson's determination not to lose Vietnam which drove him to escalate the conflict. Ball's urgings were swept aside as unconvincing and unviable.

The were unviable for the reason that to follow them would result in what was unthinkable to Johnson: the defeat

of American strength in a little third-world country. Of course, in the last analysis, this is exactly what happened.

CONCLUSION

In the preparation of this paper, I have learned much. To be certain, one of the most important lessons to be found here is that quite often, a careful reading of history will serve policy makers far better than a tendency to look at ideals. Without a doubt, that tendency was one of the major reasons that Lyndon Johnson was not able to accomplish what he wanted in the Vietnam conflict. Paying little heed to the French experience, paying little heed to the studies of bombing in World War II, he chose to put more stock in the ability of the American system to produce a victory. In matters where the practical and rational conflict with the ideal, the practical side will usually prevail.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ball, George. The Past Has Another Pattern. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982.

Bowles, Chester. Promises to Keep. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Cooper, Chester. The Lost Crusade. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1970.

Gelb, Leslie H. with Richard K. Betts. The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked. Washington: Brookings, 1979.

Halberstam, David. The Best and The Brightest. London: Penguin, 1983.

Johnson, Lyndon B. The Vantage Point. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971.

Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam: A History. New York: The Viking Press, 1983.

Kearns, Doris. Lyndon Johnson and The American Dream. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Lodge, Henry Cabot. The Storm Has Many Eyes. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973.

Rostow, W.W. The Diffusion of Power. New York: Macmillian, 1972.

Taylor, Maxwell. Swords and Plowshares. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972.